

PROJECT SUMMARY

SNC Reference
Number

County: Mariposa

Applicant: American Land Conservancy

Project Title: Oakvale Ranch Easement Acquisition

PROJECT GOAL

The primary objectives of the proposed project are to acquire a conservation easement over the Oakvale Ranch to (1) prevent subdivision of oak woodlands and important wildlife habitat; (2) help the region remain an economically sustainable ranching community; and (3) secure 3,941 acres of open space and more than 10,000 linear feet of seasonal stream.

PROJECT SCOPE

The 3,941-acre Oakvale Ranch is located in the Yosemite foothills in Mariposa County, California. The ranch has been in the current landowners' family for over 150 years, having first been homesteaded (initially just 160 acres) in the mid-1850s. It has been run as a cattle operating since that time.

The American Land Conservancy (ALC) will acquire a conservation easement on the property, which will preserve significant ecological and agricultural resources. Roughly 60 percent of the property consists of oak woodland; the remaining land is annual grassland with potential for vernal pools. A number of species use these oak woodlands for habitat including deer, wild pigs, dove, quail, geese, raptors, and rodents.

Cattle have been raised on the ranch for the last 150 years. Present use is a full calving cattle ranch with calf weaning weights averaging 650 pounds. The third generation of the original homesteading family currently manages the ranch and is expected to be joined by members of the fourth generation in the coming years. The family has utilized responsible land stewardship practices during its tenure, protecting habitat along the way.

This project is near conservation easements held by the Sierra Foothill Conservancy (SFC) and the California Rangeland Trust (CRT), as well as The Nature Conservancy's Merced Grasslands project. This project is also within an area that has been identified as critical and important for protection by the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition. ALC will partner with the California Rangeland Trust on the overall project; CRT will be holding the conservation easement.

Based on the appraisal of the property value, the value of the easement (still being determined) is currently estimated to be \$2,715,000. ALC is requesting \$1,000,000 from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to be used toward the purchase of the easement (about 35% of the total price), and will raise the balance of the funds from other sources. ALC is in discussions with the California Department of Fish and Game, Region 4 (for Wildlife

Conservation Board Oak Woodlands Conservation Program funding) for conservation easement funding. Transactional and due diligence costs are estimated at \$35,500 and will be covered by ALC (funds already committed.)

Major tasks to complete the project include landowner negotiations, fundraising, due diligence, completion of the purchased easement transaction, and assurance of post-project monitoring of the easement (to be carried out by CRT). To date, the terms of the easement have been negotiated, an appraisal of the land value prior to the easement has been completed and the appraisal of the value after the easement is in process. This appraisal, as well the Phase I Environmental Assessment is expected to be completed by the end of 2008.

This project will contribute to the protection and restoration of rivers, lakes, and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water, and other natural resources by helping to protect a considerable landscape in the Yosemite foothills. This project would also further conservation efforts started by SFC and CRT. Furthermore, this project would address the SNC program goal of aiding in the preservation of working landscapes.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

- Supervisor Janet Bibby, Mariposa County Board of Supervisors, District III
- California Assemblyman Dave Cogdill, 25th District
- U.S. Representative George Radanovich, House of Representatives, California 19th District
- William Loudermilk, Regional Manager (Region 4), California Department of Fish and Game

SNC PROJECT DELIVERABLES AND SCHEDULE

DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Easement acquisition	May or June 2009
Final reports to SNC	Summer, 2009

SNC PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
Easement acquisition	\$1,000,000
SNC GRANT TOTAL	\$1,000,000